

ANNOUNCEMENT OF FEDERAL FUNDING OPPORTUNITY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Federal Agency Name(s): National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Department of Commerce

Funding Opportunity Title: Marine Fisheries Initiative (MARFIN)

Announcement Type: Initial

Funding Opportunity Number: NOAA-NMFS-SE-2010-2001772

Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance (CFDA) Number: 11.433, Marine Fisheries Initiative

Dates: Full proposals must be received and validated by Grants.gov on or before 5 p.m. EDT on August 17, 2009. Please note: Validation or rejection of your application by Grants.gov may take up to 2 business days after submission. Please consider this process in developing your submission timeline. Applications received after the deadline will be rejected / returned to the sender without further consideration.

Funding Opportunity Description: The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), Southeast Region, is seeking proposals under the Marine Fisheries Initiative Program (MARFIN), for research and development projects that optimize the use of fisheries in the Gulf of Mexico and off the South Atlantic states of North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida involving the U.S. fishing industry (recreational and commercial), including fishery biology, resource assessment, socioeconomic assessment, management and conservation, selected harvesting methods, and fish handling and processing. This program addresses NOAA's mission goal to "Protect, Restore, and Manage the Use of Coastal and Ocean Resources Through an Ecosystem Approach to Management.

FULL ANNOUNCEMENT TEXT

I. Funding Opportunity Description

A. Program Objective

MARFIN is a competitive Federal assistance program that funds projects seeking to optimize research and development benefits from U.S. marine fishery resources through cooperative efforts involving the best research and management talents to accomplish priority activities. Projects funded under MARFIN provide answers for fishery needs covered by the NMFS Strategic Plan, available from the Southeast Regional Office (see Contact), particularly those goals relating to: rebuilding over-fished marine fisheries, maintaining currently productive fisheries, and integrating conservation of protected species and fisheries management. Funding priorities for MARFIN are formulated from recommendations received from non-Federal scientific and technical experts and from NMFS research and operations officials.

With the long term planning capabilities available through the Southeast Data Assessment and Review (SEDAR) process, the priorities are selected to coordinate assessment needs with this solicitation. There is no preference between short-term and long-term projects.

B. Program Priorities

1. Bycatch

The bycatch of biological organisms (including interactions with sea turtles and marine mammals) by various fishing gear types can have wide-reaching impacts from a fishery's management and an ecological standpoint. Numerous factors contribute to bycatch and bycatch mortality, including fishing gears, depth, species morphology, environmental variables, and regulations. Determining methods and gears for reducing bycatch and bycatch mortality can reduce fishing mortality and operational costs, increase efficiency, and result in less waste. Priority research areas include:

- a. Data collection and analyses of shrimp trawl fisheries in the Southeast U.S. to expand and update current bycatch estimates, temporally and spatially emphasizing areas of greatest impact by shrimping. Sampling effort should include estimates of numbers, weight, and random samples of size (age) structure of associated bycatch complex. The statistical design and extent of the shrimp-trawl observation program should ensure bycatch data collected are appropriate and sufficient for stock assessment of the bycatch species, specifically red snapper.

b. Identification, development, and evaluation of gear, non-gear, and tactical fishing options to reduce bycatch in the Southeast U.S. shrimp trawl fisheries.

c. Obtaining estimates of fishing effort in the Southeast U.S. shrimp fishery through the use of vessel monitoring systems, electronic logbooks, or other data collection sources.

Note: guidance and research requirements for shrimp trawl fisheries are contained in the Cooperative Bycatch Plan for the Southeast, available from NMFS (see Contact).

d. Characterize and assess the impact of bycatch of regulatory discards in the commercial and recreational reef fish fisheries including depth-related release mortality for species caught with hook and line, bottom longline, and bandit gear.

e. Characterize the species composition, age, size, sex, and disposition (e.g., discard mortality rates) of all fishes caught (landings and discards) by commercial and recreational fishermen in reef fish fisheries with respect to depth and latitude, as well as estimate effort. Species of interest include: South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico black grouper, red grouper, red snapper, gag, greater amberjack, hogfish, gray triggerfish, tilefish, and vermilion snapper; South Atlantic white grunt, black sea bass, red porgy, warsaw grouper, speckled hind, and snowy grouper; Gulf of Mexico yellowedge grouper; and Caribbean yellowfin grouper, yellowedge grouper, silk snapper, queen snapper, yellowtail snapper, mutton snapper, queen triggerfish, surgeonfishes and parrotfishes.

f. Identify gear and tactics that can be used to return regulatory discards to depth in the recreational and commercial reef fish fisheries to minimize or reverse pressure-related fishing trauma.

g. Develop on-board recording systems (e.g., video monitoring) that will capture information on discarded fishes in the commercial and recreational reef fish fisheries including species, length, depth, location, and disposition (float, swim, etc.).

h. Identify gear and tactics that can be used to reduce sea turtle interactions with reef fish bottom longline gear in the Gulf of Mexico.

2. Reef Fish and other Fishery Resources Associated with Reef Environments

Some species within the reef fish complex are overfished and/or experiencing overfishing because of directed efforts and bycatch in other fisheries. Reef fish are vulnerable to overfishing because they tend to concentrate over specific types of habitat, are often long-lived, may aggregate to spawn, and sometimes change sex. Priority research areas include:

a. Collection of basic biological data for species in commercially and recreationally important fisheries. For all reef fish species, representative age, length, and sex composition data are needed for all fisheries (commercial, and MRFSS, headboat) gear, seasons, and areas. Life history studies are needed that cover the complete geographic range of species scheduled for assessments. Species specific estimates of steepness and natural mortality are also needed for stock assessments, as well as estimates of how catchability has changed overtime due to technological and other advances. In addition, data are also needed on less dominant stocks not scheduled for assessments, including Caribbean species.

(1) Age and growth of reef fish:

(a) Description of the age and growth patterns, especially for South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico red grouper, black grouper, red snapper, gag, greater amberjack, hogfish, tilefish, and vermilion snapper; South Atlantic white grunt, black sea bass, red porgy, warsaw grouper, speckled hind, and snowy grouper; Gulf of Mexico yellowedge grouper; and Caribbean yellowfin grouper, silk snapper, queen snapper, yellowtail snapper, mutton snapper, queen triggerfish, surgeonfishes and parrotfishes that are scheduled for stock assessments. Black grouper, misty grouper, yellowedge grouper, red hind, speckled hind, coney, graysby, warsaw grouper, other less dominant stocks, and management units for which data are lacking in the Caribbean require more age information. Better methods and standardized techniques are needed for aging yellowedge grouper, tilefish, snowy grouper, blueline tilefish, and other deep water species. Resolve any discrepancies in fish age estimates by different institutions. Age composition of commercial and recreational discards is needed.

(b) Collect otoliths from groupers, snappers, and other reef fish species according to the Gulf States Marine Fisheries Commission (GSMFC) otolith manual. If proposal is selected for funding, coordinate studies and design sampling systems to provide production-style aging programs for the reef fish fishery with Steve VanderKooy at GSMFC (228) 875-5912. Analyze age information (by gear and sector) considering temporal and geographic effects, where applicable. Develop standardized techniques for aging reef fishes. Resolve any discrepancies in fish age estimates by different institutions.

(c) Age sampling from commercial, headboat, and Marine Recreational Fisheries Statistic Survey (MRFSS) that is representative of the fisheries for South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico red grouper, black grouper, red snapper, gag, greater amberjack, hogfish, gray triggerfish, tilefish and vermilion snapper; South Atlantic white grunt, black sea bass, red porgy, warsaw grouper, speckled hind, and snowy grouper; Gulf of Mexico red grouper, red snapper, and gray triggerfish; and Caribbean yellowfin grouper, silk snapper, queen snapper, mutton

snapper, yellowtail snapper, queen triggerfish, and yellowedge grouper.

(2) Population assessment of reef fish and other fishery resources associated with reef environments. Innovative methods are needed for assessing data-poor species, including length-based assessment approaches. Compare data-poor assessment approaches with approaches (e.g., age structured assessment model) for data-moderate or data rich species

(3) Develop fishery independent methods for monitoring and predicting recruitment of reef fishes in the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic. .

(4) Assess the contribution of live-bottom habitat, Marine Protected Areas in the South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico, habitat areas of particular concern (HAPC) off Fort Pierce, Florida (Oculina bank), and off west central Florida (i.e., Florida Middle Grounds) to reef fish recruitment.

(5) Stock structure of reef fish and other fishery resources associated with reef fish environments.

(a) Examine retention and residency of reef fish species. Examine temporal and spatial differences in the size at age, size at maturity, and other life history characteristics.

(b) Genetic research on stock structure of red grouper, gag, and other commercially and recreationally important reef fishes in the Gulf and South Atlantic.

(c) Otolith microchemistry of dominant reef fish from the Gulf, South Atlantic and Caribbean to determine estuarine nursery habitat.

(d) Coordinated tagging studies between researchers in the Gulf and South Atlantic to determine the magnitude of exchange of gag and greater amberjack between the Gulf and South Atlantic.

b. Management of reef fish:

(1) Identify ways to design, manage, and implement a U.S. Caribbean fishing permit specific to gear or fishery.

(2) Collect and assemble commercial and recreational catch information for reef fish species in the Caribbean. Needed data include: species caught, pounds landed, gear used, fishing effort (e.g., trip length, number of traps, number of sets, number of hooks), area and habitat fished, number of fishers, and depth fished. Information on landings by species is

particularly needed in the U.S. Virgin Islands. Methods are also needed for improving fishery independent data reporting in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands so that reliance on adjustment factors for estimating catch may be reduced.

(3) Develop a pilot program for fisheries dependent and independent sampling of reef fish species, such as groupers, tilefishes, and snappers, including quantifying bycatch, catch composition, and size frequency.

(4) Evaluate the utility of electronic logbooks and other data collection systems for commercial and for-hire fisheries in the Gulf and South Atlantic. Projects should focus on validation of data and timeliness of data delivery.

(5) Evaluate the efficacy of various size limit and bag limit combinations for reducing reef fish mortality and bycatch.

3. Red Snapper Research

Red snapper are overfished and undergoing overfishing in the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic. Both stocks are being rebuilt. Additional information is needed to improve stock assessments of red snapper. Research priorities include:

(a) Development and evaluation of gear, fishing tactics, and management measures to minimize the bycatch of or increase the survival of discarded red snapper and other reef fish species in the directed and shrimp trawl fisheries.

(b) Characterization and assessment of the impact of bycatch of undersized red snapper, including release mortality, during recreational and commercial fishing. Research on the catch-and-release mortality of red snapper and other reef fish species, by gear (e.g., capture by commercial bandit rigs that are electrically or hydraulically powered), fishery (e.g., headboat, private boat, charter boat, commercial), and depth. Studies are needed to evaluate acute (short-term observations typically at surface by observers) with chronic, long-term release survival rates. More information is needed on release mortality and discard rate by depth, fish size, season and fishery.

(c) Research to document predation rates on discarded red snapper and other reef fish species.

(d) Life history studies that cover the complete range of the species, including fecundity estimates by length and age. Fecundity samples are particularly needed from older red snapper.

- (e) Pilot projects for developing red snapper abundance indices covering a broad seasonal/spatial scale, age structure, age specific mortality rates, and recruitment indices.
- (f) Estimates of red snapper mortality rates through traditional tagging methods or utilization of genetic tag methods.
- (g) Research (e.g., otolith analysis, tagging, etc.) to better describe stock structure and mixing rates between the eastern and western Gulf of Mexico. Research should include oceanographic data to determine whether transport from the Campeche Banks could be supplying important numbers of larvae to the western stock.
- (h) Provide information on the effects of shrimp trawling on red snapper through community effects including nutrient cycling and changes in predation pressure.
- (i) Examine the age structure of red snapper taken from longlines (survey and fishery) and other gear, to evaluate the geographic distribution of fish as they age.
- (l) Conduct representative sampling of age- and length-composition consistently across area, time, and gear.
- (m) Research to clarify the magnitude and timing of density dependent compensation in juveniles by estimating survival at different densities of juvenile abundance.
- (n) Utilize simulation studies to identify and evaluate appropriate management strategies (including use of various reference points) and corresponding assessment modeling approaches for the fishery complex (shrimp, red snapper, vermilion snapper, etc.). Research could also test the hypothesis that red snapper production is enhanced in some way by increased shrimp trawling.
- (o) Obtain better estimates of red snapper natural mortality and release mortality in commercial and recreational fisheries.

4. Economic and Sociocultural Studies

Social and economic assessments are required components of all fishery management plans and actions. These assessments support the accomplishment of management objectives while minimizing adverse social and economic impacts. Current priority research needs are:

- a. Development of economic incentives and other innovative alternatives, including bycatch

quotas, to gear and season/area restrictions as ways to reduce bycatch. The project should contrast the relative costs, potential gains, and level of bycatch reduction associated with traditional methods and any innovative alternatives addressed by the project.

b. Estimation of demand and supply relationships in the market for for-hire services. Fishing quality (stock size, catch per unit effort, average fish size) as a determinant of demand and supply should be emphasized. Key species are red drum, king mackerel, Spanish mackerel, red grouper, gag, black grouper, dolphin, wahoo, vermilion snapper, yellowtail snapper, red snapper, greater amberjack, and Atlantic black sea bass. The models should be applicable to the evaluation of the economic effects of common management tools, including, but not limited to, minimum and maximum size limits, bag limits, and seasonal closures. Important supply and demand factors such as cost, trip duration, time of departure, capacity, services offered, target species, fishing location, etc., should be investigated. Specific attention should also be given to species target behavior, time and space decisions, and whether profit maximization is an appropriate motivational assumption for the supply of for-hire services.

c. Estimation of fishing behavioral and effort supply models in response to common fishery management tools such as quotas, fixed seasonal closures, trip and bag limits, and size limits for the commercial sector. Specific attention should be given to species target behavior, time and space decisions. The intent of this research is to determine the basis upon which fishermen make their fishing related decisions (e.g., when to fish, where to fish, how much to fish, what species to target, what gear to use, etc.) in response to regulation.

d. In-depth ethnographic profiles of communities in the Gulf of Mexico (all states) and South Atlantic (Ft. Pierce, Florida through North Carolina only). These include communities already identified as having a substantial involvement in fishing and communities for which insufficient information exists to make status determination. Applicants should contact NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service for appropriate prospective communities, based on the results of on-going investigations. Profiles should include descriptions of the community, commercial and recreational fishing-related activities and businesses, historical information on fishing related activities, community structure and social ties based on fishing, and changes in the community due to federal regulations on the fisheries. The profiles should test the hypothesis that the community is substantially engaged in or substantially dependent on fishing, as defined by the MSFCMA.

e. Examination of the costs and benefits of vessel and/or license buy-back programs in the shrimp fisheries (Gulf and South Atlantic). The analysis must include costs of the program and examination of alternative funding mechanisms.

f. Evaluation of alternative effort control management measures in the federal shrimp

fisheries (Gulf & South Atlantic). The analysis should include a comparison of the potential economic, social, and cultural impacts at the vessel, individual, and community level, and examine the desirability of single species versus multiple species approaches.

g. Evaluation of the allocation of harvests (TAC/quotas) among competing user groups. Key fisheries include individual species (red snapper, vermilion snapper, king mackerel, red grouper, and gag), Atlantic snapper-grouper, and species groups (grouper). The analysis should quantify the economic value to each sector and identify the allocation that maximizes the economic benefit to the nation, subject to the biological constraints specified by the respective rebuilding plans, where appropriate. Evaluation of the commercial sector should include analysis by gear type and fishing location (western and northern Gulf, eastern Gulf, Keys), while that of the recreational sector should distinguish between charter, party boat, and private angler by fishing location.

h. Develop a framework to define and estimate optimum yield (OY) for a federally managed Southeast fishery, incorporating, as per SFA definition, social and economic components into the current biological definition of OY.

i. Update of fishing community profiles documents for the Gulf and South Atlantic. Update should include: overview of current conditions; census data; federal and state permit data; fishing infrastructure descriptions and provide summaries of engagement in fisheries for each community.

j. Evaluation of the impacts of MPAs on affected communities and all related fishery sectors. Research should include: identification of affected communities, affected fisheries and gears, modes of fishing and enforcement issues. Research should describe the changes in fishing behaviors and gear and other social disruptions as a result of placement of MPA. Should describe new business opportunities and other benefits as a result of MPA.

k. Evaluation of the cumulative impacts of IFQs on affected communities and all fishing sectors. Research should focus on, changes in fishing behavior, impacts on different gears, modes of fishing, and enforcement issues.

l. Survey or ethnographic research on fishing crew for commercial and for-hire vessels in the South Atlantic or Gulf of Mexico.

5. Aquaculture

Priorities for research include:

a. Conduct studies on the siting of commercial aquaculture facilities in an ecosystem

management context (e.g., using of GIS and other mapping tools). Studies should consider interactions of aquaculture facilities with marine ecosystems; identification of appropriate areas for aquaculture development; and oceanographic factors affecting facility siting.

b. Develop science-based methodologies for evaluating impacts associated with offshore marine aquaculture. Pilot studies should be developed in conjunction with commercial aquaculture operations to evaluate the potential impacts of an operation on benthic habitat, water quality, marine fishes, and protected resources. Project results should emphasize methodologies and guidance for minimizing any potential impacts.

c. Conduct studies assessing the social and economic impacts of offshore marine aquaculture in the Gulf of Mexico.

d. Develop methods for spawning and rearing reef fishes (i.e., snappers, groupers, coastal migratory pelagics (i.e., mackerels, cobia, etc.), stone crab, and spiny lobster.

C. Program Authority

Authority for the Marine Fisheries Initiative Program is provided by the following: 15 U.S.C. 713c-3(d).

II. Award Information

A. Funding Availability

Approximately \$2.0 million may be available in fiscal year (FY) 2010 for projects. This amount includes possible in-house projects. Actual funding availability for this program is contingent upon Fiscal Year 2010 Congressional appropriations. The NMFS Southeast Regional Office anticipates awarding approximately ten projects that will range from \$25,000 to \$175,000 per year. The total Federal amount that may be requested shall not exceed \$350,00 for a two year project, and \$525,000 for a three year project. Publication of this notice does not obligate NMFS to award any specific grant or cooperative agreement or any of the available funds. Project proposals accepted for funding with a project period over one year do not have to compete for the additional years of funding. However, funding for the additional years is contingent upon the availability of funds and satisfactory performance and is at the sole discretion of the agency.

B. Project/Award Period

The period of awards may be from one to three years.

C. Type of Funding Instrument

Proposals selected for funding will be funded through a grant or cooperative agreement depending upon the amount of collaboration, participation, or involvement of NOAA in the management of the project. An example of substantial involvement is: an exchange between the recipient and a NMFS laboratory of sample materials for analysis.

III. Eligibility Information

A. Eligible Applicants

Eligible applicants may be institutions of higher education, nonprofits, commercial organizations, individuals, state, local and Indian tribal governments. Federal agencies or institutions are not eligible. Foreign governments, organizations under the jurisdiction of foreign governments, and international organizations are excluded for purposes of this solicitation since the objective of the MARFIN program is to optimize research and development benefits from U.S. marine fishery resources.

B. Cost Sharing or Matching Requirement

Cost-sharing is not required for this program.

C. Other Criteria that Affect Eligibility

Not applicable.

IV. Application and Submission Information

A. Address to Request Application Package

Application packages are available through www.grants.gov. If applicants do not have internet access, applications may be requested from: National Marine Fisheries Service, State/Federal Liaison Branch, 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, FL 33701.

B. Content and Form of Application

1. Format Requirements:

All pages should be single-spaced and should be composed in at least a 12-point font with one-inch margins on 8 1/2 x 11 paper. The project description may not exceed 25 pages, exclusive of title page, project synopsis, literature cited, budget information, resumes of investigator, and letters of support (if any). Failure to follow the requirements will result in the rejection of the application and subsequent return.

Any PDF or other attachments that are included in an electronic application must meet the above format requirement when printed out.

2. Content Requirements:

The following information must be included. Failure to submit it will result in an application not being reviewed.

- a. Signed Title Page: The title page (SF-424) must be signed by the authorized representative. Electronic signatures submitted through www.grants.gov satisfy this requirement.
- b. Project Synopsis (1-page limit): It is critical that the project synopsis accurately describes the project being proposed and conveys all essential elements of the activities. It is imperative that potential applicants tie their proposals to one of the program priorities described in Section I.B.
- c. Project Description (25-page limit): The applicant should describe and justify the project being proposed and address each of the evaluation criteria as described below in Section V. Project descriptions should include clear objectives and specific approaches to achieving those objectives, including methods, timelines, and expected outcomes.
- d. Literature Cited: If applicable.
- e. Budget and Budget Justification: There should be a detailed budget justification accompanying the SF424A Budget Information form. Indicate matching funds if provided in a separate column. Provide justifications for all budget items in sufficient detail to enable the reviewers to evaluate the appropriateness of the funding requested.
- f. Resumes (2 pages maximum for each major participant).
- g. Standard Application Forms: Please refer to the appropriate application package available through Grants.gov.
- h. NOAA must analyze the potential environmental impacts, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Consequently, as part of an applicant's package, applicants are required to answer the following questions:
 - (1) Has any National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) or other environmental compliance documentation (e.g., Endangered Species Act Biological Opinion; Letter of Concurrence or

Biological Assessment/Evaluation; Clean Water Act permit; State Historic Preservation Officer consultation; state environmental compliance documentation (mini-NEPA); etc.) been completed? If yes, list the environmental compliance documentation that has been completed and provide copies of the documentation as appropriate.

(2) Would the proposed activity or environmental impacts of the activity be subject to public controversy? If yes, describe the potential controversy.

(3) Would the proposed activity have potential environmental impacts that are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks? If yes, describe the impacts that are uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks.

(4) Is the proposed activity related to other activities (both NOAA and non-NOAA that together may cumulatively adversely impact the environment? For example, the proposed activity is one of a series of projects that together may cause a change in the pattern of pollutant discharge, traffic generation, economic change, flood plain change, or land use. If yes, briefly describe the other activities and discuss how the related projects would have cumulative impacts on the environment.

(5) Would the proposed activity involve a non-native species? If yes, describe how the non-native species is involved.

(6) Would the proposed activity occur within a unique geographic area of notable recreational, ecological, scientific, cultural, historical, scenic or aesthetic importance? If yes, describe the area, including the name or designation if known.

(7) Would the proposed activity affect districts, sites, highways, structures, or objects listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places or cause loss or destruction of significant scientific, cultural, or historical resources? If yes, describe the impact.

(8) Would the proposed activity affect public health or safety? The effects may be adverse or beneficial and temporary, long-term, or permanent. If yes, describe the effects and the circumstances that would cause these impacts.

(9) Would the proposed activity affect directly or indirectly, in an adverse or beneficial manner, any listed endangered, threatened, or otherwise protected species or their critical habitat under federal and state laws including the Endangered Species Act and the Marine Mammal Protection Act? If yes, name the species and/or habitat that will be impacted and describe the circumstances that would impact the species and/or habitat.

Applications must identify the principal participants, and include copies of any agreements describing the specific tasks to be performed by participants. Project applications should give a clear presentation of the proposed work, the methods for carrying out the project, its relevance to managing and enhancing the use of Gulf of Mexico and/or South Atlantic fishery resources, and cost estimates as they relate to specific aspects of the project. All applications must include funding for the principal investigator to participate in an annual MARFIN Conference in the southeast regional area at the completion of the project. Budgets must include a detailed breakdown, by category of expenditures, with appropriate justification for both the Federal and non-Federal shares.

Applications should exhibit familiarity with related work that is completed or ongoing. Proposals should state whether the research applies to the Gulf of Mexico, South Atlantic or North Atlantic for highly migratory species or multiple areas. Successful applicants are required to collect and manage data in accordance with standardized procedures and format approved or specified by NMFS and to participate with NMFS in specific cooperative activities that are determined by consultations between NMFS and successful applicants before project grants are awarded. All data collected as part of an awarded grant must be provided to the National Marine Fisheries Service.

C. Submission Dates and Times

Full proposals must be received and validated by Grants.gov on or before 5 p.m. EDT on August 17, 2009. Please note: Validation or rejection of your application by Grants.gov may take up to 2 business days after submission. Please consider this process in developing your submission timeline. Applications received after the deadline will be rejected / returned to the sender without further consideration. Applications submitted through www.grants.gov will be accompanied by an automated receipt of the date and time of submission. Hard copy applications will be hand stamped with time and date when received.

Important: All applicants, both electronic and paper, should be aware that adequate time must be factored into applicant schedules for delivery of the application. Electronic applicants are advised that volume on Grants.gov is currently extremely heavy, and if Grants.gov is unable to accept applications electronically in a timely fashion, applicants are encouraged to exercise their option to submit applications in paper format. Paper applicants should allow adequate time to ensure a paper application will be received on time, taking into account that guaranteed overnight carriers are not always able to fulfill their guarantees.

D. Intergovernmental Review

Applications submitted by state and local governments are subject to the provisions of executive Order 12372, Intergovernmental Review of Federal Programs. Any applicant submitting an application for funding is required to complete item 16 on SF-424 regarding clearance by the State Single Point of Contact (SPOC) established as a result of EO 12372. To find out about and comply with a State's process under EO 12372, the names, addresses and phone numbers of participating SPOCs are listed in the Office of Management and Budget's home page at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants/spoc.html>.

E. Funding Restrictions

Indirect Costs - If the applicant does not have a negotiated indirect cost rate agreement with a Federal agency, then they may direct cost all charges, or submit a request to establish a rate. The Federal share of indirect costs proposed must not exceed 25 percent of the total direct costs identified on Standard Form 424A Budget Information. The indirect rate is fixed at 25 percent in order to maximize the funds available for actual research and to allow applicants to recover a reasonable indirect cost.

Construction is not an allowable activity under this program. Therefore, applications will not be accepted for construction projects.

Funding beyond the first year will be dependent upon satisfactory performance and the continued availability of funds.

F. Other Submission Requirements

Please refer to important information in "Submission Dates and Times" above to help ensure your application is received on time.

Applications must be submitted through www.grants.gov unless an applicant does not have internet access. In that case, hard copies with original signatures may be sent to: National Marine Fisheries Service, State/Federal Liaison Branch, 263 13th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, FL 33701.

V. Application Review Information

A. Evaluation Criteria

Applications responsive to this solicitation will be evaluated by three or more appropriate private and/or public sector experts to determine their technical merit. These reviewers will provide individual evaluations of the proposals. No consensus advice will be given. These reviewers provide comments and assign scores to the applications based on the

following criteria, with the points shown in parentheses:

1. Importance/relevance and applicability of proposed projects to the program goals (35 points):

This criterion ascertains whether there is intrinsic value in the proposed work and/or relevance to NOAA, Federal, regional, state, or local activities. For this program, this includes: Does the proposal have a clearly stated goal(s) with associated objectives that meet the needs outlined in the project narrative?

2. Technical/scientific merit (40 points):

This criterion assesses whether the approach is technically sound and/or innovative, if the methods are appropriate, and whether there are clear project goals and objectives. For this program, this includes: Does the proposal clearly identify and describe, in the project outline and statement of work, scientific methodologies and analytical procedures that will adequately address project goals and objectives?

3. Overall qualifications of applicants (15 points):

This criterion ascertains whether the applicant possesses the necessary education, experience, training, facilities, and administrative resources to accomplish the project. For this program, this includes: Does the applicant possess the necessary education and identify the appropriate resources to complete the project?

4. Project costs (10 points):

This criterion evaluates the budget to determine if it is realistic and commensurate with the project needs and time frame. For this program, this includes: Does the budget appropriately allocate and justify costs?

5. Outreach and education (no points):

This criterion assesses whether the project provides a focused and effective education and outreach strategy regarding NOAA's mission to protect the Nation's natural resources. This criterion is not used by the MARFIN program.

B. Review and Selection Process

When we receive applications we will screen them to ensure that they were received by the deadline date (see Submission Dates and Times); include SF 424 authenticated by an authorized representative; were submitted by an eligible applicant; address one of the funding priorities for federally managed species; and include a budget, statement of work, and milestones, and identify the principal investigator. We do not have to screen applications before the submission deadline in order to identify deficiencies that would cause your application to be rejected so that you would have an opportunity to correct them. However, should we do so and provide you information about deficiencies, or should you independently decide it is desirable to do so, you may correct any deficiencies in your application before the deadline. After the deadline, the application must remain as submitted; no changes can be made to it. If your application does not conform to these requirements and the deadline for submission has passed, the application will be returned without further consideration.

Following the technical review, we will determine the score for each individual review and average the individual technical review scores to determine the final technical score for each application. Then, we will rank applications in descending order by their average technical scores. The top twenty applications will be forwarded to a panel for further review. Those applications that are not in the top twenty category will be eliminated from further consideration.

Those applications that meet the top twenty ranking will be presented to a panel of non-NOAA fishery experts known as the MARFIN panel. Each member of the MARFIN Panel individually considers: if needs of the Agency are addressed in each proposal; if the project assists industry; and if the project addresses issues that are important to regional fisheries management. Needs of the Agency follow the information identified in the Magnuson-Stevens Act, Title III, Sections 301 and 404. The individuals on the Panel provide comments and rate each of these proposals as either "Recommended for Funding" or "Not Recommended for Funding". The Panel will give no consensus advice. The Program Manager ranks the proposals in the order of preferred funding based on the number of Panel members recommending the proposal for funding. In the event that there are two or more projects tied in the panel's percent selected category that are competing for the final available funds, all tied projects will be given equal consideration by the selecting official regardless of their peer review score. The selecting official will resolve any ties by selecting the projects that best meet immediate research needs.

C. Selection Factors

The MARFIN Panel ratings will be provided in rank order to the Selecting Official for final funding recommendations. The Selecting Official shall award in the rank order unless the proposal is justified to be selected out of rank order based on the following factors:

1. Availability of funding;
2. Balance/distribution of funds:
 - a. geographically
 - b. by type of institutions
 - c. by type of partners
 - d. by research areas
 - e. by project types
3. Duplication of other projects funded or considered for funding by NOAA/federal agencies;
4. Program priorities and policy factors;
5. Applicant's prior award performance;
6. Partnerships with/Participation of targeted groups;
7. Adequacy of information necessary for NOAA staff to make a NEPA determination and draft necessary documentation before recommendations for funding are made to the Grants Officer.

The Selecting Official may negotiate the funding level of the proposal. The Selecting Official makes final recommendations for award to the Grants Officer who is authorized to obligate funds.

D. Anticipated Announcement and Award Dates

Subject to the availability of funds, successful applications are usually recommended for funding within 275 days from the date of publication of this notice. The earliest start date of awards (1st of a month) is approximately 395 days after the date of publication of this notice. Applicants should consider this selection and processing time in developing requested start dates for their applications.

The exact amount of funds awarded, the final scope of activities, the project duration, and specific NMFS cooperative involvement with the activities of each project are determined in pre-award negotiations between the applicant, the NOAA Grants Office and the NMFS Program Office. Recipients must not initiate projects until an approved award is received from the NOAA Grants Office.

VI. Award Administration Information

A. Award Notices

Successful applicants will receive notification that the application has been recommended for funding to the NOAA Grants Management Division. This notification is not an authorization to begin performance of the project. Official notification of funding, signed by the NOAA grants Officer, is the authorizing document that allows the project to begin. Notification will be issued to the Authorizing Official and the PI of the project either electronically or in hard copy. Unsuccessful applicants will be notified that their proposals were not selected for recommendation.

B. Administrative and National Policy Requirements

Department of Commerce Grants and Cooperative Agreements Notice

Administrative and national policy requirements for all Department of Commerce awards are contained in the Department of Commerce Pre-Award Notification Requirements for Grants and Cooperative Agreements contained in the Federal Register notice of February 11, 2008 (73 FR 7696). A copy of the notice may be obtained at <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/fr/search.html>

Limitation of Liability

Funding for potential projects in this notice is contingent upon the availability of funds. In no event will NOAA or the Department of Commerce be responsible for proposal preparation costs. Publication of this announcement does not oblige NOAA to award any specific project or to obligate any available funds.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

NOAA must analyze the potential environmental impacts, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), for applicant projects or proposals that are seeking NOAA federal funding opportunities. Detailed information on NOAA compliance with NEPA can be found at the following NOAA NEPA Web site: <http://www.nepa.noaa.gov/>, including our NOAA Administrative Order 216-6 for NEPA, <http://www.nepa.noaa.gov/NAO216--5--TOC.pdf>, NEPA Questionnaire, <http://www.nepa.noaa.gov/questionnaire.pdf>, and the Council on Environmental Quality implementation regulations, <http://ceq.eh.doe.gov/nepa/regs/ceq/toc--ceq.htm>. Consequently, as part of an applicant's package, and under their description of their program

activities, applicants are required to provide detailed information on the activities to be conducted, locations, sites, number and species expected to be caught, species and habitat to be affected, possible construction activities, and any environmental concerns that may exist (e.g., the use and disposal of hazardous or toxic chemicals, introduction of non-indigenous species, impacts to endangered and threatened species, aquaculture projects, and impacts to coral reef systems). In addition to providing specific information that will serve as the basis for any required impact analyses, applicants may also be requested to assist NOAA in drafting of an environmental assessment, if NOAA determines an assessment is required. Applicants will also be required to cooperate with NOAA in identifying feasible measures to reduce or avoid any identified adverse environmental impacts of their proposal. The failure to do so shall be grounds for not selecting an application. In some cases if additional information is required after an application is selected, funds can be withheld by the Grants Officer under a special award condition requiring the recipient to submit additional environmental compliance information sufficient to enable NOAA to make an assessment of any impacts that a project may have on the environment.

C. Reporting

Unless otherwise specified by terms of the award, performance and financial reports are to be submitted semi-annually. Performance reports should include progress on identified milestones. Electronic submission of reports is preferred. All reports will be submitted on a semi-annual schedule and must be submitted no later than 30 days following the end of each 6-month period from the start date of the award. In addition to the financial and performance reports, grant recipients will be required to submit a comprehensive final performance report 90 days after the project end date.

VII. Agency Contacts

For questions regarding the application process, you may contact: Ellie Francisco Roche, Chief, State/Federal Liaison Branch, (727) 824-5324, or Ellie.Roche@noaa.gov

VIII. Other Information

Applicants must have a Dun and Bradstreet Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number (www.dnb.com) and be registered in the Central Contractor Registry (CCR) (www.ccr.gov). Allow a minimum of thirty days to receive a DUNS number and to be registered in CCR. Applicants are strongly encouraged not to wait until the application deadline date to begin the application process through <http://www.grants.gov>.